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"MY MOTHERLAND" SERIES" XE. NO. 31.

522

INDIA'S DEFENCE

PAST : PRESENT : FUTURE

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INDIA'S DEFENCE

PAST: PRESENT: FUTURE

No department of Indian administration has roused so much controversy in recent years as the Army. And in the present crisis, it has been playing the most decisive role. And that is because its importance is two fold. First, the sum spent on it is so large as to dominate the entire budget, consuming nearly half the net revenues; and secondly, its composition at the present moment, specially in the higher ranks, is yet to take note of India's political aspirations. Consequently, in either of those spheres it constitutes a very tough problem; but its proper solution is essential if the new Indian constitution is to have a fair start.

The Indian Army had its birth in the middle of the eighteenth century. When the French captured Madras in 1746, the British saw that they owed the defeat to the sepoy army of the French and thereupon, decided to imitate their example. Indians were recruited from all available areas and even to officer ranks; and there were three such armies based on Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, the largest being the last, called the Bengal Army. They were complete units, equipped in every branch and to them the East India Company owed its great conquests. With extending territories, the size of the army steadily increased until in 1857, the sepoys in the three armies numbered 231,000 against only 38,000 British soldiers.

The Mutiny and After

The Great Mutiny changed the entire character of the British forces in India. The Government decided that Indian

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sepoys shall not far outnumber the soldiers and at the same time, were denied admission to the artillery.* The strength of the Indian section was reduced to 140,000 and British forces were increased to 65,000.

Several reorganisations have since taken place, specially under Kitchener and later as a result of experiences gained in the Great War. To-day, the regular army consists of three sections, the covering troops whose purpose is to delay the advance of the hostile army until the Indian Field Army is properly mobilised for the decisive fight; then the Field Army, the most powerful units, and finally the Internal Security Troops, who are to come into action when the regular police are unable to cope with a disturbance. It is these that are called up during persistent riots.

The strength of the Army is as follows:—
The British Army 58,000
The Regular Indian Army 132,000
Indian Reservists 34,000
Auxiliary Force of Europeans & Anglo Indians 32,000
Territorial Force of Indians 15,000.

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*I agree with those who think that it is not judicious to train any native of India to the use of guns. They make excellent artillery men and they attach great value to guns and these very circumstances make it dangerous to place them in their hands—*Lord Elphinstone*, Governor of Bombay.

It appears to be the concurrent opinion of all men that we should keep the artillery wholly in our hands..... The natives have a genius for casting and working guns, and we should not afford them means of enjoying it.....The natives die at their guns. Their practice in this War (the Mutiny) is allowed to have been at least as good as our own—*Lord Ellenburough.*

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There are in addition the forces of Indian States, what were called the Imperial Service Troops, numbering 37,000.

British India has nothing to do with the Indian State Forces. They are maintained by the various States but are available to the Paramount Power; and they proved themselves quite useful in the Great War.

These State Forces consist of three Classes A, B and C. The last are of little military value. Those of Class A are of the same training and value as the Indian Field Army and equipped on the same plan. Not so is class B, though its value is not neglible.

Non-Indian Auxiliaries

The Auxiliary and Territorial Forces are post-war creations. Indians are excluded from the former; and in every respect, they constitute a second line of defence for the British forces in India. In link with the same is the Reserve of Officers, Europeans whose services will be requisitioned if the Indian Army is to be suddenly expanded as at the time of the last war or to replace casualities in its officer ranks.

When the Indian Army is nationalised, there will be no room for this branch unless it is to be merged in the Territorial Force of which it can be a separate section as the Parsi unit is at present.

The Territorial Force consists of three sections, Provincial battalions, Urban units and University Training Corps units. The last has very little of military value at present, though its potentialities are large and are bound to be enjoyed when the Indian recruits to commissioned ranks are increased. The membership of that corps lasts during their university days, after which, if they are so inclined, they may join the provincial battalions or urban units. From the military

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standpoint, the most important are the provincial battalions who are liable to service for a period of six years or four as specified, which period can be renewed if they so desire.

The Territorial Force is capable of vast expansion and improvement. In the first place, it is confined to only the infantry section. Though there is no ban in law to its expansion to other spheres, in practice, there is; and it must be removed. At the same time, by offering better inducements, the strength of this force can and must be considerably increased, so as to function in two ways. In peace time, it should be the national militia—ready to go to the support of the police in case of need as in riots and other disturbances, and in war time it should be ready to form not only the second line but also the nucleus to help the building up of an emergency force in all its grades.

This is the cheapest way of providing for the defence of any country and in a vast country like India, the possibilities are immense. At the expenditure of a faw lakhs of rupees annually, it should be possible to provide a force numbering several thousands—a force big enough to keep the invader away from our shores.

The Reserves

Next to the Territorial Forces, and closely akin to it, is the group of Army Reservists. They number to-day only 34,000 and are graded in two classes, A and B, according to their fitness for active service. Except while under training, which is only one month annually for Class A and a fortright bienially for Class B, they are paid only Rs. 7 and Rs. 4 per mensem, which means that on an average they do not cost even a hundred rupees per annum. As they consist of trained sepoys, their fighting value is first rate; and they afford another means to reduce the national defence bill. Their number can be easily increased; and perhaps that is

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not done to-day because of political reasons*—the same as have led to the increase of the ratio of British troops to the Indian after the Mutiny.

Too Big for India

The Indian Army is today smaller than what it was ten years ago ; but it is still too large for Indian requirements.

Indians feel that they are paying for Empire requirements. In particular, in maintaining what is called the Field Army, " India's striking force in a major war, organised so as to possess the fullest measure of mobility and offensive power with as high a standard as possible of technical equipment," the objective, it is contended, is to keep ready an expeditionary force for Britain ; any way at no time has it been necessary in recent years to utilise the whole Field Army in India.

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*In India under British rule, the former martial tendencies of the native population gradually became lessened till they almost disappeared and this circumstance is considered one of the safeguards of our rule. So conscious has the Government been of this that within the present generation the native population has become generally disarmed that the people have been enjoined to give up arms. The Government never passed its Indian subjects through the ranks nor sent them to their homes in the vigour of life. Therefore to train them, to keep them for a limited time, either with the colours or in reserve, and then altogether to discharge them without pension to their homes in numbers increasingly large.....would be to ensure a constant influx into civil population of military men no longer bound to Government and to again infuse into the people a part of that martial spirit which has been disappearing and the disappearance of which is still advantageous to us—*Sir Richard Temple.*

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It is also significant that no British Dominion maintains such a force. Their armies are all intended for peace purposes, what may be compared to the Internal Security Troops in India. And as a consequence of this difference in the military policy, the burden of the Dominions is almost negligible, as can be seen from the following figures, giving the proportion of military expenditure to the total revenues.

India	...	33.7
Australia	...	3.7
Great Britain	...	23.6
Canada	...	3.7
New Zealand	...	5.2
Union of South Africa	...	3.1
Irish Free State	...	6.8

In view of India's poverty, this impost on her should have been the lightest; but it is in practice the highest—nearly nine times as high as that in Canada where the average income of the people is at least ten times higher!

Why So Costly

Till recently, the reason given for the maintenance of so large a "striking force" was the Czar's alleged intention to add India to his Empire. The Russo-Japanese war must have killed all such plans. Any way, after his departure, that argument does not hold good. For, the Soviet has shown no inclination whatever for territorial aggrandisement. If it had any, the recent troubles in the Far East gave her an occasion to seize a large slice of rich territory. She could also come to such a bargain with Japan; but it did not. And India has no neighbour strong enough to justify the maintenance of so large a force.

The justice of this criticism has been recognised by many eminent Britishers, including Lord Olivier, the Secretary of State in the first Labour Cabinet; and the debates at

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the first R.T.C. in the Military Sub-Committee led India to believe that Britain would soon afford relief in that respect.

The costliness of the Indian army is due not only to its largeness, but also to its British section. While an Indian sepoy costs Rs. 650, a British soldier costs about Rs. 2 500.

So even if the requirements of defence should demand that the strength of the army should be kept at the present figure, *i.e.* if Indian sepoys should replace the British, the saving will exceed ten crores of rupees per annum.

Another subject of controversy has been the officering of the Indian army. There was a time, not far distant either, when it was officered by Indians alone up to fairly high ranks; but they were steadily replaced by Britishers. And till about ten years ago, the Commissioned Ranks were denied to Indians.

Then a departure was made and about twenty officers are now recruited every year after training at Sandhurst ; and in theory, no post of the Army is closed to Indians. But in practice, proceeding at the present rate, the Indian army will not be Indianised for generations.

A Disastrous Veto

At this stage, a reference may be made to a scheme drawn up in 1922 and discussed and approved of both by the Governor-General-in-Council and by the military department to meet the Indian demand.

According to it, the whole Indian Army was to be Indianised in thirty years in all its departments by regulating the recruitment of Indians to the Commissioned Ranks as follows :—

First to 14th year	81 per year
15th to 23rd year	182 „
24th to 30th year	227 „

If this decision had been acted upon, Indian politics would have in all probability taken quite a different turn. There

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would certainly not have been so much suspicion or bitterness that one finds to-day. Unhappily, when the scheme went to the India Office, it was not only turned down, but buried so secretly that the Skeen Committee, appointed four years later, was quite oblivious of it. Its very existence came to the notice of the outside world only in 1930 at the Round Table Conference when Sir M. Shafi courageously asked for its production for the information of the Defence Sub-Committee.

The blow to India from the veto of the 1922 scheme was rendered all the more distressing by the further decision to confine Indianisation to only eight units. The reason given was that it is best to confine the experiment to a small section and watch the results. It was however found that the purpose was to prevent British officers being obliged to serve under Indians! The consequence has been to look down upon those eight units more or less as pariahs and it is reported that Indian officers are most reluctant to be posted to them.

If the 1922 scheme had not been shelved, to-day, Indianisation would have progressed so far as to avoid all controversy on that account at the R.T.C. or in the Assembly; and there would have been considerable saving to the Indian exchequer.

Four Essential Reforms

Three essential reforms have been here dealt with :—

The reduction in the strength and cost of the entire army.

The replacement of British soldiers by Indians.

And the officering of the Indian Army by Indians.

There remains one more problem, of which so far very little has been heard, but which is no less essential—the Nationalisation of the Indian Army.

Though to start with, the Sepoy army was constituted of Madrasis and then of Maharattas on the West Coast, to-day, both these are almost entirely kept out of the Army,

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which is practically monopolised by certain races in the North. No case has ever been made out for such a change or discrimination; and no one acquainted with the military history of India, of even the East India Company, can justify such a policy on the ground of unfitness of the barred races.

Twenty-five years after the Mutiny, General Warre, a Commander-in-Chief, had placed on record:

"History has proved that the whole of the western coast is a military country producing a war-like population. The southern Mahrattas have proved themselves in former days and are still equal to any other race in India as a fighting people. Their power has been broken and their military ardour quenched by almost total disarmament, but they are still a hardy people, in a mountainous district, inured to toil, and especially good in tracing their steps over the rough and impracticable ghats. What more can you require to make soldiers?"

Madrasis As Fighters

Another Commander-in-Chief, Sir Frederick Haines, has said: "I cannot admit for one moment that, anything has occured to disclose the fact that the Madras sepoy is inferior as a fighting man. The facts of history warrant us in assuming the contrary. In drill, training and discipline the Madras sepoy is inferior to none, while in point of health, as exhibited by returns, he compares favourably with his neighbours."

That the ban is unfortunate, no fair critic can deny. It constitutes a needless stigma on the excluded races; and it is always safe and wise to have national recruitment for a national army.

The reasons underlying the ban can be gleaned from these pronouncements:

"The founders of the native army had conceived the idea of a force recruited from among the people of the country and commanded for the most part by men of their own race but of higher social position—men in a word, of the master class,

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accustomed to exact obedience from their inferiors. But it was the inevitable tendency of our increasing power in India to oust the native functionary from his seat or to lift him from his saddle, that the white man might fix himself there. So it happened, in due course that the native officers..... were pushed aside by an incursion of English gentlemen..... and the native officer then began to collapse into something little better than name "—*Major General Tucker.*

No more Brahmins, no more Mussalmans of Hindustan to be entertained in the regular native force—*General Hearsey.*

The Khas are more or less under Brahmanical influence and more national than the Mogar or Guruny and therefore less suited for employment in the Bengal Army—*Major General Cotton.*

To preserve the distinctiveness that is so valuable and which while it lasts makes the Mahommadan of one country despise, fear, or dislike the Mahommadan of another, corps should in future be provincial and adhere to the geographical limits within which differences and rivalries are strongly marked.....By the system thus indicated, two great evils are avoided ; firstly that community of feeling throughout the native army and that mischievous political activity and intrigue which results from association with other races and travel in other Indian provinces—*Sir John Lawrence.*

To sum up, after the Mutiny Britain thought that it was dangerous to have a National army ; but today the situation has entirely altered.

Curiously enough, this reform did not receive proper attention at the R. T. C.—perhaps because under the new constitution there will be no difficulty to introduce it.

Army Control

At present, the control of the Indian Army is vested in the British Cabinet through the Secretary of State. In no depart-

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ment is Lord Curzon's description of the Government of India as the subordinate branch of the British Cabinet so correct as in Army affairs ; and in practice the Cabinet means, the British War Office. Under the Montford Reforms all that the Assembly can do is to express its criticisms which rarely prove fruitful. If a cut is voted in that budget, it is at once restored. It must also be admitted that after Mr. Gokhale's death there has been hardly any member in the Assembly so well informed as to make his criticisms tell by their sheer justice, so that the annual discussion of the military budget is a big sham.

If one is to judge by the proceedings of the third R.T.C., this state of affairs is to continue for some time. The new central legislature is not to have the power to reject or modify the military budget nor will the Army Member of the Central Cabinet be responsible to the legislature. At the same time, in other aspects of Army Reform,there will be changes. There will soon be an Indian Sandhurst and a national turn has already been given to the recruitment of the Indian officers.

Prospects of Reform

Whatever the decision as to the control of the Army in the next constitution, whether by the legislatures, or by the Viceroy independantly, the other changes will have to be decisive and they are bound to be, though the prospects seem at present to be rather gloomy.

In the first place, there is the Disarmament Conference. If Britain agrees to the reduction of the military budget, it is inconceivable that India will be denied the benefit and if the Hoover plan be accepted, the relief to India will have to be at least 17 crores, which is impossible without a thorough re-organisation of the army along lines demanded by the Indian people.

Even if the Disarmament Conference be a complete failure, reforms are inevitable. The new constitution will be

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unworkable if the military bill should stand at 52 or even 50 crores of rupees. The continuance of that outlay will necessitate the starving of the provincial governments, by itself a serious matter, and what is worse, the incidence of taxation by the central Federal Government will have to be so high that no Cabinet can hope to get through such a budget. If the new constitution is to have a fair start, that outlay must be reduced and very considerably; and it can be reduced if Britain makes up its mind to trust India and leave it to shape its military policy on the model of the Dominions.

In that direction, the very first decision to be reached will be the rate at which the British forces stationed in India are to be reduced. The justice of that claim has been accepted by England; and the question is at present under active consideration. The issue is: at what rate is the reduction to be effected and that will depend primarily on the larger issue—the co-operation of the Indian nation in the working of the new constitution and the dispersal of British suspicion as to Indian aims and intentions.

The Minimum Outlay

If Indian reformers have their own way, what, it may be asked, will be the outlay on defence? The reply is furnished by the Dominions.

Take Canada, for instance. It is also a big continent. So is Australia. If those countries can limit their defence to within five percent of their national revenues, why should not India?

It must however be acknowledged that the Dominions are not treating England fairly, who is compelled to shoulder the biggest load in Empire defence. And this is one reason why India's burden also is so high. England has merely obliged the Dominions at India's cost; and if an equitable arrangement be come to, the reduction in India's contribution will have to be made up by the Dominions, unless in the

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meantime the Big Powers come to their senses and decide on a reduction of armaments.

In either of those contingencies, India's military outlay will be far less ; and that can be managed on these lines :

The Field Army, the striking force, will have to be very considerably reduced, to what is necessary to defend the North West Frontier in a sudden emergency.*

The Cheaper Way

The task of national defence will have to fall mainly on the Reservists, whose number will have to be considerably increased and that can be easily done by so altering the conditions of service in the Regular Army as to supply a

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* There is also the old grievance about the cost of the Army. In 1884 a change took place in our frontier policy, and in that year Lord Ripon left. Then began the epoch of bombastic Imperialism at the expense of India. The Finance Minister of that day objected, but military expenditure was increased at a bound by 1,600,000 rupees per annum. The cost of annexing Upper Burma was similarly placed on Indian shoulders and no justification ever has, or ever can be, offered for it. It is unspeakably mean of us to place this burden on the Indian's back simply because he must bear any load we put upon him. Nine-tenths of the charge of the Army in India is an Imperial charge. Canada, South Africa, and Australia should bear it as much as India. It is a piece of the most bitter cynicism to find the imperial doors of our colonies shut in the face of these poor people, who bear such an inordinate share of the cost of Imperial maintenance, and at whose expense these Dominions are protected from the fear of war. If £18,000,000 of the Army charges were met by the whole Empire we might look the Indian tax-payer in the face as honest men. At present we cannot do so.—Mr. Ramsay Macdonald in *Awakening of India.*

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steady stream of trained men every year to form the Reserve.

The problem of internal security, by no means a tough affair at any time, must be left to the Territorial Force, who have of course to be increased and organised in as many centres as possible.

It should satisfy the most cautious of Army experts if India should have 200,000 Reservists and about 100,000 Territorials. Their pay and allowance will not exceed three crores per annum; and the subsidiary cost viz. of equipment, and training camps, is not likely to double that figures. Added to that will be the cost of the regular Field Army ; and if that be entirely Indian, the task of reducing the army budget to the pre-war figure of £20 millions should be hardly difficult. That is an outside figure; and it might be possible to arrive at it even during the transitional stage, *i.e.*, even before Britain withdraws all her forces.

No reference has been made in this pamphlet to such questions as India's fitness or capacity to defend herself. And that is because they hardly need an answer. No sincere student of India's military history can have any doubts on such issues. If there should be any difficulties, they will be merely in respect of the transitional period.

We have not also discussed the question of capitation charges, the amount which India pays to the British War Office for the recruitment and training of its soldiers stationed in India. That the levy is excessive is acknowledged on all hands. Moreover, it is only a part of the bigger question, the continuance of the British Army in India, which is itself now under review.

All these controversies will vanish when it is recognised that India's defence is her own concern as it is now accepted to be the case in respect of all the Self-Governing Dominions.